Case Study

Time Inc. deploys ProImage Automated Workflow to Streamline Magazine Production

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The Chesapeake Resource Group LLC

Research Brief

The purpose of this study is to provide an independent evaluation of the degree of success achieved by ProImage in meeting the needs of Time Inc. in the delivery and commissioning of an automated advertising workflow transmission system.

ProImage contracted with the Chesapeake Resource Group LLC (CRG) to provide a fact based assessment of the degree of customer satisfaction delivered by ProImage. The appropriate information was gathered in a series of interviews with senior production management at Time Inc., and in a demonstration of the system.

CRG is a fifteen year old, independent consulting organization, specializing in technology assessment, digital workflow and computer to plate processes for the publication industry. CRG may be contacted at Chesresgroup@gmail.com.

1. Executive Summary

Our findings indicate the following key points:

- Time Inc. succeeded in meeting ambitious goals for upgrading their magazine transmission process and launching an automated advertising workflow.

- This success was achieved by using a metadata driven, automated process that eliminated costly intermediate steps and many manual interventions.

- ProImage was successful in developing and implementing a solution that fully met Time Inc's design goals. Accordingly, ProImage achieved a high degree of customer satisfaction, both as a supplier and as a development partner.

- The main differentiating feature of ProImage lies in its software architecture. This technology provides an unusually high degree of flexibility in both the form and functionality of the delivered product.

- The extensibility of the ProImage architecture is a value-added benefit that permits the development of additional solutions. This will provide Time Inc. with an ongoing ability to leverage technological developments in the communications business.

2. Background

Time Inc., a division of Time Warner, is one of the largest branded media companies in the world. Among its 95 titles worldwide are iconic names such as TIME, PEOPLE, INSTYLE and SPORTS ILLUSTRATED. The company's magazines reach more than 110 million Americans each month, and its web sites attract nearly 50 million unique visitors each month.

3. The Problem

The growth of Time Inc's brands created pressure on its aging production system that depended on a proprietary private network for transmission to their printing plants. This legacy system was comprised of dedicated hardware and software, with continuously rising maintenance costs. The biggest constraint was the provider's lack of development resources being applied to a system design that was approaching the end of its useful service life. In a sweeping step forward, Time Inc. production management made the strategic decision to both replace the transmission system and create a new method of automating the advertising workflow.

4. The Solution

The desired approach identified the need for common formats, standardized workflows, and the automatic processing of advertising and editorial assets across the network. The critical design concept was to embed metadata into each page to drive the process and eliminate many manual steps in the current system. Thus, the idea of a "smart page" was born.

In order to turn the vision into practice, Time Inc. initiated the search for a development partner with the necessary expertise based on proven products in the field. This led to the selection of ProImage, who was able to demonstrate a history of supplying successful workflow solutions to major newspapers around the globe. According to John Ialacci, President of New ProImage of America, "The opportunity provided by Time Inc. offered a perfect fit because of our experience in providing clients with tailored solutions optimized for their specific needs."

The heart of the solution deployed by ProImage is their NewsWay application. In the initial transmission replacement phase of the project, ProImage was able to improve the efficiency of the transmission by a measurable amount by interfacing with Time Inc's."Mass Transit" system that was already installed and used by the remote printing plants. Efficiencies were obtained by the elimination of logging and other manual processes.

The transmission phase was followed by the major step of automating the advertising workflow, and making it available across the network to all magazines. This process begins when clients send high resolution ads in PDF format to a web portal. Within the portal, files are pre-flighted, coded with metadata, and downloaded to NewsWay. The files are processed further by adding additional metadata from the booking and planning departments. All submitted data is validated and a visual inspection is done to pre-empt possible problems in the

printing operation. When the ads are ready, they are routed automatically to the designated print sites by NewsWay, using metadata from Time Inc.'s planning system to drive the process.

As the central node in the system, NewsWay provides management with a powerful user interface that provides real time status of the various publications by tracking the progress of pages throughout the system. The NewsWay transmission dashboard displays the time that each page was sent and received at each designated plant. The dashboard interface further provides the capability for ad hoc destination changes, page inspection and file re-transmission.

5. Implementation

Time Inc. has implemented a cloud like process for managing the flow of ad materials throughout the network. Among the efficiencies this solution has provided is the elimination of software loaded on users work stations resulting in savings in license and maintenance costs. The ad management process is almost fully automated and NewsWay has allowed a secure, reliable, and highly controlled transmission process using standard internet technologies.

In describing the relationship between the companies, Kin Wah Lam, Time Inc's Director of Digital Development commented "We've developed an excellent working relationship with ProImage that resulted in both a smooth implementation and continued system enhancements that have created additional value for our company."

6. Results

The deployment of the system has enabled Time Inc. to meet its twin goals of replacing a legacy transmission system and launching an automated advertising workflow. This has delivered both labor and cost savings, and achieved the desired ROI. Process simplification has reduced human errors and increased reliability and quality.

Peter Meirs, Time Inc's Vice President Production Technologies, commented, "Our challenge was to implement a state of the art production system that could scale, manage and integrate many combinations of magazines. Our end goal was to incorporate process automation, driven by metadata, to achieve the desired efficiencies. We installed ProImage's NewsWay and the workflow has satisfied every requirement."

7. Value added

Perhaps the greatest benefit of the ProImage architecture is the ability of the system to meet new challenges, and grow with Time Inc. into the future. The next milestone will be to develop the ability to transform the printed files quickly and easily into a format that can be displayed on tablets and other new and evolving media devices. The future beckons, and the production team is confident that they have the tools to meet these goals.